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ABSTRACT

This report describes an exploratory evaluative assessment of the first year of 2 alternative public schools for 117 chronically disruptive, committed, and/or non-attending students (grades 6-12) in Georgia. The CrossRoads program is intended to provide students with the social services, individualized instruction, and/or transitions to other programs that these students need and to make public schools more secure by removing chronically disruptive students from the regular classroom. Qualitative case study methods were used in both data collection and analysis. The observational data for each school are presented individually and then discussed together in terms of characteristics of successful programs; role perceptions of participants; factors to which participants attribute program effectiveness; and identifiable outcomes such as improved attendance, return of 64 percent of high school students to their home schools, and academic gains. Recommendations focus on the importance of a team approach to teaching and learning, the importance of community involvement, and the value of a prevention rather than punishment paradigm. (Author/DB)

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An Evaluative Assessment of Two CrossRoads Alternative Schools Program Sites in Georgia (CASE STUDY)

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An Evaluative Assessment of

Two CrossRoads Alternative Schools Program Sites in Georgia

Introduction

This past year, the state of Georgia instituted a statewide educational initiative aimed at addressing the needs of the state's chronically disruptive, committed, and/or non-attending youth in grades 6-12. The program, known as CrossRoads, was created with $16.5 million dollars appropriated by the 1994 state legislature from both general and lottery funds (Georgia Department of Education, 1995). Eighty-nine school sites were funded through grants. Some sites began accepting students in the fall of 1994, while others did not actually open until later in the first semester or the beginning of the second semester. Students in this program typically spend at least one semester at the CrossRoads school. The Georgia Department of Education (DOE) outlines the purpose of the CrossRoads Program as follows:

1. To provide chronically disruptive, committed, and/or non-attending students with the social services and individualized instruction and/or transitions to other programs they need to become successful students and good citizens in the school and larger community; and
2. To make the public schools more safe and secure by removing chronically disruptive students from the regular classroom (Georgia Department of Education, 1995).

This report describes the outcome of an exploratory evaluative assessment of the CrossRoads Alternative Schools Program for the Georgia Department of Education. Undertaken as one component of a statewide assessment and evaluation plan conducted after the first year of the Program's operation, this study was designed to "identify the characteristics of effective collaborations and to provide in-

depth, descriptive information about program structure; community/family involvement; collaborative activities; services; participant philosophy, roles, and perceptions; and other factors related to program successes" (Project Proposal, 1995). In order to accomplish this task, two CrossRoads Program sites deemed as successful programs by the Georgia DOE were studied. Qualitative case study methods were employed to collect data from each site.

The Program assessment was conducted by a Program Specialist from The University of Georgia's Occupational Research Group. Support staff included clerical personnel who were primarily involved in the transcription of interviews. The following sections of this report describe the research methodology employed in conducting the study, the findings and conclusions of the investigation and recommendations for further study. A list of references is contained in the final section of the report.

Methodology

Design of the Study

Adhering to the purposes of this exploratory evaluative assessment project as outlined in the Proposal, this project focused on collecting data that would provide the reader with an understanding of the CrossRoads Program specifically regarding the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of successful CrossRoads Programs?
- How do program participants see their role in the Program?
- What factors do participants believe are related to Program effectiveness?
- What outcomes can be identified?

The answers to these questions were obtained through the utilization of qualitative case study methods both in data collection and analysis. Patton (1990) suggests that qualitative research methodology is "particularly oriented toward

exploration, discovery, and inductive logic" (p. 44). Since the research is conducted in the natural setting, a holistic approach to studying the phenomenon can be undertaken and "detailed attention can be given to nuance, setting, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies, and context" (pg. 51).

The qualitative case study is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bonded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit" (Merriam, 1991, p. xiv). It is characterized by four essential properties: it is particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive (Merriam, 1991). This study is particularistic in that it focuses upon a particular program, the CrossRoads Alternative School Program. It is descriptive in that the results of the study take the form of rich, "thick" "*detailed descriptions* of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors; *direct quotations* from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts; and excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records, and case histories" (Patton, 1980, p. 22). These descriptions are the "raw data from the empirical world" (p. 22). Heuristic refers to the notion that the study can confirm what the researcher already knows or bring about a new meaning or understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This evaluation study is inductive,

> To the extent that the researcher attempts to make sense of the situation without imposing preexisting expectations on the phenomenon or setting under study. Inductive analysis begins with specific observations and builds toward general patterns. Categories or dimensions of analysis emerge from open-ended observations as the evaluator comes to understand program patterns that exist in the empirical world under study (p. 44).

Although case study methods were employed in this evaluation, I am reluctant to call this study a case study, but rather will refer to it as a preliminary case study or

a pilot. The reason for this is that the case study requires a thorough and in-depth investigation into a phenomenon. Restrictions in the amount of time available to visit each of the two school sites limited the depth and richness of the study.

Prior to describing the sites, settings, and participants of this study, I find it important to mention that pseudonyms have been used in this report to mask the identities of the sites and the study participants. All the individuals involved in this study were assured confidentiality. The data in this report is presented in a way that protects the participants' anonymity. Therefore, wherever possible, identifiable information has been disguised. Specific quotations will not be attributed to any individual participant.

Sample Selection

Two CrossRoads Alternative School Program sites were selected by the Georgia Department of Education. Their selection was based upon a purposeful and extreme sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that "one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most" (Merriam, 1991, p. 48). Extreme sampling "focuses on cases that are rich in information because they are unusual or special in some way" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). The cases identified for this study were selected because they were deemed to be examples of successful CrossRoads Programs. Additionally, one site was selected from Region III, a rural area of the state, and the second area was selected from Region I, a mixed rural and urban region (See Appendix A). Both of these programs were new programs which were fully funded for the fiscal year 1995.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected at two CrossRoads Alternative School sites selected by the Georgia Department of Education. The data collection occurred during two site visits to each of the schools. These visits were scheduled as close

together as possible due to the approaching end of the school year. The data collection occurred during a time span of two days at each site.

Several methods were employed in the data collection phase of this study. Interviews with school administrators, teachers, counselors, and students comprised the primary source of data. Non-participant field observations were also conducted at the school sites. Additional document data in the forms of student handbooks, student writing, class assignments, administrative forms, reports, and other materials were collected. The use of multiple data collection methods and sources was one way to obtain a more holistic picture of the programs under study. Doing so also served to strengthen reliability and enhance the validity of the data collected through methodological and data triangulation. Generalizability in a statistical sense is not a goal of qualitative research, nor of this study. However, it is intended that the presentation of the findings and the use of rich, thick description will enable the reader to understand the program and share in the experience of the study's participants.

A combination of semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with administrators, teachers, counselors, and students at each site. I had outlined several areas of inquiry regarding the interviewees' experiences in/with the program, impressions of the program, differences from the regular school program, likes and dislikes, and changes in student behavior and academic success. Although I did not structure the wording of each question, I did try to cover the previously mentioned topics in the interview sessions. However, since this was an exploratory study, I did not want to structure an interview so rigidly that I lost the flexibility of discovery, probing and inquiring, and allowing the participants' voices to be heard. Once I began an interview, I focused on a specific area of inquiry. As

the interview progressed, I allowed the participant to guide the interview. I then probed and inquired as I felt necessary.

The interviews all took place at the schools, in faculty, administrator, and counselor's offices as well as in the classrooms, hallways and cafeterias. In one case, I was able to interview the school's Assistant Superintendent. This interview was conducted off campus in the Assistant Superintendent's office. All interviews were tape recorded with the permission of the interviewees, with the exception of the student interviews. Student interviews were not tape recorded due to legal restrictions. Handwritten notes were taken during most interview sessions when this could be done unobtrusively. These supplementary notes contained accounts of visual cues such as body language, as well as my thoughts and general impressions of the interview and the interviewee. The interviews were transcribed verbatim from the recorded tapes.

The second source of data collection employed in this study was non-participant observation. As a non-participant observer, I adopted only one role, that of observer. Observation as a data collection method has some limitations. First, it can be unpredictable because although the researcher may be observing, this does not ensure that the activity or phenomenon he/she is studying will occur during the observation period. The researcher may also need to return to the site many times to obtain meaningful data. Another limitation is that data collected is limited to the present time. Activity occurring in the past or future cannot be observed.

For the purposes of this study, non-participant observation was employed. Once I entered the schools, I was able to freely move about, observe interactions between students, administrators, counselors and teachers. I spent part of the total time of the site visits observing activity in the principal's office, counselor's office, classrooms, computer and sciences labs, hallways, cafeterias, and outside the school

as students arrived and left the schools. In every case, I made an effort to be as unobtrusive as possible and not to disturb the usual flow of activity at the schools. I donned attire that gave me the appearance of someone who was approachable and non-threatening to the students, yet enabled me to maintain a professional appearance when speaking with administrators and teachers.

Field notes were taken during interview and observation periods whenever possible, as well as after the interview and observation periods. These notes, both descriptive and reflective are intended to capture "a slice of life" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 119). They are the researchers account of what happened in the field. The field notes that were taken during data collection for this study included details of what I saw, heard, and experienced as well as my hunches, ideas, feelings, and biases. These notes serve to assist with the identification of the researcher's subjectivity and are used to "acknowledge and control observer's effect" (p. 124).

A third data collection strategy used in this study was the use of documents. Documents in the forms of student handbooks, school maps, student writing, newspaper articles, brochures, reports, and class assignments were collected from administrators and teachers at the schools.

Analysis of the Data

Data analysis "is the process of making sense out of one's data" (Merriam, 1991, p. 127). It involves:

> Systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 153)

The data was analyzed by a process that occurred in several steps. Initial analysis began during the data collection periods. As interviews were conducted and pertinent information emerged, avenues of further inquiry were noted and pursued in subsequent interviews. Transcripts of interviews, field notes, and document data from each site were organized into notebooks for easy accessibility. The data was then read and reread several times. The information from these sources was condensed and brought together to form a narrative description of each site. The purpose of the narrative description is to present a holistic picture of the program at each site. The intent is for the reader of this report to understand the programs and the contexts in which they operate.

A second focus of the analysis relied on the use of a comparative analysis of the data. Beginning with the first reading of the transcripts, and keeping the four questions identified in the Proposal in mind, the data from the two sites was examined for themes and patterns that informed the original four evaluation questions. Sections of the transcripts were marked and noted and significant portions were highlighted. A typology of categories or themes was developed from the data. These categories were then further refined.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the relatively short time frame for site visits and data collection limited the depth and scope of the study. A second limitation involved the insufficient opportunities to speak with students at the sites. The short amount of time I was at each site left little time to develop a trusting relationship with the students. Because many of these students were academically behind in their work and needed to be in classes, I was reluctant to ask to have them excused from class to speak with me. Additionally, the highly structured nature of these schools did not accommodate any periods when students

had free time. At one site, the principal selected several students to be interviewed and remove them from class for a short period of time to speak with me. I met with these students in an unused classroom or the cafeteria. At the second site, I was only able to speak with students in the classroom.

Another limitation was related to the time in which this study was conducted, the end of the school year. It is known to most educators that student behavior may vary at different times of the day, before holidays, and towards the end of the school year. The impact of the approaching conclusion of the school year upon student behavior and subsequently this study, cannot be determined.

Case Descriptions

The following section of this report contains a detailed description of the two CrossRoads Alternative School Programs. The intent of this section is to depict a "slice of life" at the school sites. Each description is a composite of two visits to each site. The first section describes the CrossRoads Program named the Westview School for purposes of this report, followed by a school I named Woodland County CrossRoads. It is intended that these descriptions will assist the reader to reach a better understanding of the two programs.

Westview School

The Westview School alternative campus is a small school located in the northwestern part of the state. It's stated mission is to provide "an alternative educational opportunity for violent and aggressive youth that provides them with a viable opportunity to develop the skills that enable them to become productive members of a democratic society" (Program Proposal, 1994, p. 1). The targeted group of students for this program are those students "who have failed to respond to the continuum of preventive, interventive, and alternative services provided for at-risk students" (p. 1). These students have "exhausted all the opportunities to

develop and enhance the behavioral management skills provided for them, and . . . will face expulsions and even incarceration" (p. 1).

Centrally located to all of the schools in the county, the Westview School serves students in both the middle and high school levels. The school was set up to accommodate one hundred and twenty students, however, at the time of this study, there were one hundred and one students enrolled, 45 at the high school level and 56 at the middle school level. Table 1 displays a breakdown of students by grade level.

Table 1. Number of Westview Students by Grade Level

Grade Level	*Total*
7th Grade	23
8th Grade	33
9th Grade	33
10th Grade	4
11th Grade	8
Total	101

Of the 101 students, the racial distribution was 60 black and 41 white. Female students numbered 28 and males numbered 73. The majority of students at the school were participants in a free or subsidized lunch program with 71 receiving free lunches and 2 receiving reduced price lunches. Students were referred to the program for a variety of infractions ranging from truancy to illegal behaviors. Table 2 presents the reasons for entry into the school.

Table 2. Reasons for Entry to Westview School

Reason for Entry	*Total*
Disruptive Behaviors	55
Rebellious Behaviors	91

Aggressive Behaviors	36
Illegal Behaviors	7
Truancy	18
Drop Out Recovery	12
Pregnancy or Birth	0
Returning DCYS Student	15
Other	0

The school is housed in close proximity to a public housing project in a building that formerly served as an elementary school and later on, an Alternative School. It is a brick one-story building that was built employing a circular design (See Appendix B). The classrooms and offices are arranged symmetrically around a central cafeteria with half the school serving middle school students and the other half serving high school students. Teachers are assigned their own classrooms. Other rooms house the principal's office or front office, counselor's office, Georgia Cities and Schools Office, a computer lab, library/media center, and individual study period (ISP) room. Two trailers and a multi-purpose gymnasium are located on the grounds outside of the main building. One trailer serves as classrooms, the other as an office for a full time case worker from the Department of Children and Family Services.

High school students remain enrolled at Westview for one semester. Middle school students attend for a full year before being afforded the opportunity to return to their home school. In the past year, over thirty high school students from the program had returned to their home schools. Of those, three had been returned to Westview.

The program operates on a point and level system. All students must complete three levels to become eligible to return to their home school. Additionally, high

school students must accumulate a total of 4500 points and middle school students 9000 points. Students earn one day's credit by accumulating a minimum of 50 points during a school day. As students progress through the different levels, they also earn additional privileges and adopt increasing personal responsibility.

The school's staff members consist of Mrs. Fredricks, the principal, her secretary, a clerk, thirteen teachers, one counselor, and four teaching assistants. Additional staff from Cities and Schools included a director, DFACS case worker and a staff member from the Department of Mental Health who visited the school once a week.

The morning I visited the school, the students had not yet arrived. I was greeted at the entrance by a cheerful man carrying a walkie talkie radio. My first impression was that he was a security guard. This assumption later proved incorrect, as he was a coach waiting to greet students as they arrived. Students are greeted each morning as they arrive to school by bus. They are also seen off in the afternoon as they leave. This greeting serves several purposes. First, it sets the mood for students arriving at school. The first person they see at school in the morning has a "smiling face." The greeting also creates a "friendly setting at school." Students know, "they're going to be treated like human beings, they're not going to be treated as criminals." Second, it allows the staff an opportunity to screen out potential problems and deal with them before they become actual problems or situations in the school. For example, if a student looks as if he/she is having "a bad day" or seems upset, he/she is identified and might receive immediate counseling. Students wearing shirts with vulgar language or alcohol related motifs which are deemed to be inappropriate and in violation of the dress code are identified. Staff are also afforded an opportunity to screen students for weapons. Although the school has no security cameras or metal detectors, weapons can be detected by

trained personnel. Many times faculty who have gotten to know individual students can tell when a problem is brewing.

The coach, Mr. Cobb, escorted me into the school and to the principal's office. As I entered through one set of double doors, I noticed a sign posted on the outside wall of the building. It warned ominously,

> It is unlawful for any person to carry, possess or have under control any weapon at a school building, school function or on school property or on a bus or other transportation furnished by the school.
>
> The term "weapon" means and includes any pistol, revolver, or any weapon designed or intended to propel a missile of any kind, or any dirk, bowie knife, switchblade knife, ballistic knife, any other knife having a blade of three or more inches, straight-edged razor, spring stick, metal knucks, blackjack, or any flailing instrument consisting of two or more rigid parts connected in such a way to allow them to swing freely, which may be known as a nun chuck, or fighting chain, throwing star or oriental dart, or any weapon of like kind.

Having read this warning, I was uncertain about what to expect. The warning quickly faded from my thoughts as I entered the building, its cinder block walls decorated midway up with brightly colored orange and blue horizontal stripes, a reflection of the school colors of Auburn University, the Superintendent's alma mater. The school appeared neat and spotless. A sign proclaimed, "Welcome to Westview, Campus of Opportunity." Other posters and signs presenting positive or motivational themes were mounted on the walls. One poster read "Think positive/Think for yourself", while another read, "Who runs your life? You do." The entryway faced the school cafeteria, a large circular room with round tables and chairs. Student artwork and projects were posted on the walls throughout the hallway.

The Westview school day begins at 8:55 am and ends at 2:50 pm. Students who eat breakfast in the school cafeteria arrive early and eat between 8:30 am and 8:52 am. Shortly after I arrived, students began arriving to eat. That morning, students sat at tables and chatted with each other. The academic day begins at 8:55 am and is divided into six fifty minute class periods. The schedule is highly structured. Each period is preceded by a bell. Once the bell rings, students have three minutes to arrive at their classes and be seated. Thirty minute lunch periods in the school's cafeteria are scheduled from 11:34 am to 1:04 pm. Two shifts are scheduled for middle school students from 11:34 am to 12:04 pm and from 12:04 pm to 12:34 pm. High school students have lunch from 12:34 pm to 1:04 pm. Students can apply to receive free or reduced breakfast and lunch.

I was guided to the principal's office and introduced to the principal, Mrs. Fredricks. A professionally dressed African-American woman, Mrs. Fredricks, exuded enthusiasm about my visit. She appeared very energetic and straight forward as she guided me around the school for a quick tour. Her pride in the school and commitment to her work was revealed to me as she took care to show me the school's facilities, introduce me to the staff, and tell me about the program. She repeatedly referred to the school as a "campus of opportunities" and a "second chance" for students.

During the tour, I was shown the media center and Mrs. Fredricks told me that Westview was a Next Generation School. This meant that the media center was to be networked to three other schools in the local area so that students could do research and work through the network. Students would eventually be able to access the libraries of several other schools. I was also shown the school's computer laboratory. This high technology lab enabled students to employ computers for learning keyboarding skills and writing as well for working with educational

software. Although the majority of instruction at the school is not computer-based, a number of educational computer programs are available to the students. As students began to arrive, Mrs. Fredricks introduced me to Mr. Rand, the counselor. She then left to monitor the halls as students arrived. This is her way of maintaining visibility. Explaining her need to leave, she told me, "You must be visible."

The counselor's office is a beehive of activity and a focal point for the school. The office is shared by Mr. Rand, the school's full-time counselor and Ms. Smith, a teaching assistant, who works with Mr. Rand. The room is decorated with bulletin boards displaying positive and motivational themes, quotes and sayings. Mr. Rand pointed out one particular saying to me. It read, "If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always gotten." Another bulletin board was titled, "Things your mother always told you, but you didn't want to hear." The contents of the room included a desk, conference table, small round table with several chairs and a television set. A young man was sitting watching television when I arrived. Mr. Rand explained his open door policy, "I want it [the school and his office] to be theirs too." Students who come to school early can watch an educational video tape prior to the start of classes. A video discussing communication skills was playing at the time of my visit.

Several students entered the room. A few sat down. They appeared comfortable in this office. Others entered and left the room, depositing their hats in a wall cabinet. I had noted earlier that there were no student lockers in the hallway. Mr. Rand explained this to me as he discussed the dress code. Students are not allowed to wear hats at school. They can, however, leave their hats with Mr. Rand or in Mrs. Fredrick's office and pick them up after school. Mr. Rand explained, "No hats, no chains, no book bags . . . if they bring a book bag, I lock it up in the lockers

here. . . Hats, they have a box they put them in the office . . . they want them locked up so they won't lose their hats. During other times of the day, students came to Mr. Rand's office to rest if they felt ill or to relax if they were having difficulties at school that day.

Mr. Rand described his job as counselor as one of "trying to make them [the students] relax." He enjoys his job because it gives him "a chance to work in the counseling field." However, he said he dislikes it when students fight "and others stand around and watch" as that behavior reminds him of "movies on prison breaks." His duties consist of scheduling new students in classes, giving them reading and math tests, and administering learning style inventories. He also counsels them, does some individual instructional supervision with students having difficulties with teachers or needing courses that are not typically offered at Westview, and works with students returning to their home schools. Newly arriving and returning students go to Mr. Rand prior to starting their classes at the school.

As the first period bell rang, students entered the hallway and walked to their classes in an orderly fashion. Each faculty and staff member also entered the hallway at this time. The time between classes served as another opportunity to do preventative screening. Teachers stood outside their classroom doors, greeting each student individually and by name. They tried to identify any problems that might be arising. At times, a faculty or staff members would pull a student aside for a short talk. Although I did not hear any staff members raise their voices when addressing students, they firmly communicated their points. For example, as students entered a history class, the instructor noticed a young male student inappropriately touching a young woman. The teacher turned to him and said, "What did I tell you about keeping your hands to yourself?" The boy immediately stopped what he was doing

and went to sit at a table. I also witnessed Mrs. Fredricks addressing a young man wandering in the hallway. She questioned him, "Young man, where are you supposed to be?" Another time she caught a students harassing another students. Suprising him, she said, "You should look to see where I am before you do something!" Mrs. Fredricks asked me if I had heard of "The One Minute Manager." When I said that I had, she indicated her strategy of conducting a lot of one minute preventative counseling sessions during her day at school.

At the second bell, all students were in their classes. Mrs. Fredricks walked through the hallway opening each classroom door and checking to make certain everything was all right. She related that although each room had a "panic button" to call the office, she wanted to personally check on each room. She reiterated the importance of her being highly visible within the school. In fact, she seemed to have her hand on the pulse of the school. I was amazed that during my visit to the school, she seemed to be everywhere.

Classes at Westview were small with approximately seven to ten students per class. Each classroom door was decorated with some type of welcome sign. The interior walls of the classrooms were decorated with posters and student work reflecting positive themes similar to those in the hallway and counselors office. In most rooms, students sat at tables rather than desks. Computers were available to students in almost all classrooms.

The classes I attended were structured in a way to keep students on task. Students were given a good deal of individualized attention by teachers who walked around the class answering questions and providing assistance. In one math class, the instructor praised the students who remained on task, "You all are doing real good!" However, in some classes, students became distracted and were corrected by the teachers. For example, a student in the computer lab pulled two chairs together

and laid down. The teacher immediately asked him to sit up. In another class, students were working on computer-based projects. Two boys sat together and began taking the computer apart. The instructor had to tell them to get back to work. It is important to note here that the teachers never raised their voices, but asked students in a normal tone to get back to work.

A representative from the health department conducted a class on AIDS for seven young women at the school. She showed a video and gave students several handouts. The video portrayed teenagers their own age. The girls eyes were glued to the television set. One young woman had a deeply concerned look on her face. It was clear that the video reached her. The instructor asked her, "Are you O.K.?" The girl replied, "Yes" and then a discussion ensued.

Another office I visited that played an important role at the school was that of the director of Georgia Cities and Schools. Having recently moved into the school building, Ms. Sands primary responsibility is to connect the school and its students to the community and needed services. Her work has helped to bring to the school staff from the Health Department, counseling, a mentor program, self esteem, communication and life skills classes, as well as other resources.

Woodland County CrossRoads

Woodland County CrossRoads school, located in the northeastern part of the state, is a small school set in a rural nonfarm community with a large land area and relatively small population. The school is a separate program from the regular school programs and is housed in a two room frame school building situated behind the local high school. Similar to Westview's mission, Woodland strives "to offer intensive, targeted interventions to help students develop appropriate behaviors and adequate academic skills" (Program application, 1995).

The targeted group served by the school are students in grades 6-12 who have been identified by administrators as chronically disruptive students and/or are on probation or consistently in in-school suspension. The capacity of the school is twenty students. At the time of my visit, sixteen students were enrolled. However, as many as eighteen students had been enrolled during the past year. Students are enrolled in the program for a minimum of six months (one semester) before they are evaluated as to whether or not they can return to their home school. Table 3 displays a breakdown of student enrollment by grade level.

Table 3. Number of Woodland Students by Grade Level

Grade Level	*Total*
6th Grade	4
7th Grade	5
8th Grade	4
9th Grade	2
10th Grade	1
Total	16

Of the 16 students enrolled, all were male. The racial distribution of students was 8 white and 8 black. The number of students in the free and subsidized lunch program was 7 with 6 receiving free lunch and 1 reduced lunch. I did not receive information regarding the reasons why students had been referred to the CrossRoads Program.

The school is staffed by five people, Mrs. Young, the director/principal, Mr. Pryor, the school's social worker, Mrs. Taylor, the lead teacher, Mrs. Smith, the paraprofessional and computer instructor, and Mr. Dunn, an assistant teacher. Mrs. Young serves as the school social worker for the entire Woodland school system as well as the director/principal of the alternative school. Mr. Pryor takes on the

school social work responsibilities for the CrossRoads school, serves a liaison between the school, middle school, high school, and the community.

The school building can be entered from one of two doors, a front or a back door. The front door is the most frequently used by staff. It faces the back of the high school. A well worn path in the grass leads from the alternative school building to a separate building, where the school's director and social worker have their offices and a counseling room is located. The back door, more frequently used by students, leads to a grassy area behind the building.

Upon entering through the front door, I first walked through a storage area. A second door led to the first classroom, a computer laboratory. Forestry service posters depicting grouped elements from nature such as plants and animals are mounted on the walls. Also displayed were positive suggestions or thought provoking sayings. Examples of the sayings include, "Profanity is the mark of a conversational cripple" and "Somebody may think that you are a fool, but don't open your mouth and prove it." Other posters are signs created by the students to welcome Governor Miller to their school. He had recently visited the school and met with the CrossRoads students.

Woodland's computer lab is "state of the art." The room is bright and spacious. Its layout can be found in Appendix C. The computer facility consists of ten networked computers and a server. One computer is used as a teacher's station. Additional peripherals such as CD-ROM players and laser disc players were also connected to the network. The computer laboratory is the primary mode of academic instruction at the school. New students in the program are started on a program of computer-based academics based on their ITBS scores in math and reading. They are initially enrolled in a slightly lower level then the one for which

they tested. After the first few times on the computer, the computer assesses the students' instructional level and individually adjusts his/her program accordingly.

Other academic work is conducted in the second classroom. This room contains long tables with chairs arranged in several rows. Mrs. Taylor's desk is to one side and Mr. Dunn's desk is in the front of the room. One corner of the room has a built-in storage room. This room was originally built to be used as a time-out room. However, a decision was made not to use it for that purpose. A large poster with a grid of the days of the year and multi-colored stars pasted on the grid hangs in front of the room. Mr. Dunn informed me that this "star system" is his way of visually displaying the students' accomplishments. Students receive stars for completed work and can look at the board and see how well they are doing. Other items displayed on the walls are student artwork and printouts of famous people such as Michael Jackson, Kenny Rogers, and Star Trek characters. These pictures were copied from the computer's Online encyclopedia. A poster outlines the steps used in conflict resolution. Another lists the rules: No bookbags, no drinks in bottles, no large handbags or grocery bags, follow school dress code, and follow rules in the handbook – review each quarter.

One poster prominently placed in each classroom outlines the school day schedule. School at Woodland begins at 8:30 am. The complete schedule is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Woodland School Daily Schedule

Schedule for High School

8:30	Math 20 minutes RI (Reading investigation) CRS (Critical reading skills) 20 minutes for both
9:15	Classroom Time
10:00	Science 20 minutes

10:45	Classroom Time
11:30	Complete all lab or class assignments
12:00	Lunch
12:45	Activities
1:10	Physical Education: Mon, Wed, Thurs.
2:08	Activities: T, Fri - Gym

Schedule for Middle School

9:15	Classroom Time
10:00	Math Concepts - 10 minutes Reading Workshop - 10 minutes Science Discovery - 20 minutes
10:45	Classroom Time
11:30	English - 20 minutes Reading Investigation - 10 minutes Spelling Skills - 10 minutes Math Concepts and Skills - 10 minutes
12:00	Complete all labs or class assignments
12:45	Lunch
1:10	Activities
2:08	PE
3:00	Activities

This schedule was developed after a trial and error period in which the school staff determined that the students did much better staying on task with academic assignments in the morning. Therefore, the morning work consists primarily of academics, both computer-based and written work, and the afternoon is utilized for physical education and activities. Mrs. Taylor usually starts each day with writing

assignments based on readings from the newspaper. Students write short essays on several assigned articles from two local newspapers. Mr. Pryor related how students initially refused to write. Some responded by either saying, "I don't write" or just writing the ABC's. Now, however, these same students turn in writing assignment that fill both sides of a page. Math exercises are created by Mrs. Taylor. These exercises reflect "real-life" situations. For example, students are asked to use the local supermarket advertisements to "shop" for groceries.

Physical education activity is an area that was developed and introduced in the school by Mr. Dunn. He has students involved in organized sports activities and tournaments with winners receiving trophies. Besides teaching sportsmanship, these sports activities promote teamwork. The activities periods are times when students participate in games such as UNO, checkers, and chess. The activities are aimed at teaching sportsmanship, critical thinking and social skills. In the case of chess, a local man has been working with the students. He volunteers once a week to work with them in the chess program. Other activities involve field trips. The students have already made several trips to a nearby nursing home, cooking for the residents, Christmas caroling and visiting with the residents. These trips "help the kids get outside of themselves" teaching them "respect for themselves." They have also helped them to become "proud of their program."

Students entering the program are given an orientation in which they meet with Mrs. Young and Mr. Pryor. They are told what time to be at school, what to do on the bus, and what to expect when they begin school at Woodland. Throughout the program, students are monitored. The staff have weekly meetings to discuss students' progress and behaviors. When the time comes for the students to return to their home schools, Mr. Pryor tracks them, counsels, and supports them in their

transition. At this point, however, only a handful of students have attempted to return to their home schools.

Responses to Evaluation Questions

What are the characteristics of successful CrossRoads Programs?

Several characteristics of the two CrossRoads Programs were identified by program administrators, faculty, counselors, and/or students as contributing to the success of the programs. The first characteristic relates to the perception of the working relationships among administrators, faculty, and staff as a "team." As a team, they work together towards similar goals, keep each other informed about individual students, and support each other in their decisions. This team approach was frequently mentioned during the site visits. Mrs. Smith, the paraprofessional at Woodland, related,

> We're have established a team and the kids know that we are a team. They can't play us against one another because we are united in an effort to help them. . . . We are a team now. . . . That includes all of us.

Mrs. Fredricks, Westview's principal, described her relationship with her teachers in a similar vein stating,

> We are like a team. I don't believe in 'I'm the boss and the top of the ladder and you're right under me and you do what I tell you to do.' We all know what these kids need. I leave that completely up to them and we work as a team."

As part of this team approach, administrators give the faculty and staff the flexibility to work with the students. However, they maintain strong ties with the staff by being accessible and through regular weekly or monthly meetings. At Westview, Mrs. Fredricks also maintains her relationship with her "team" by remaining constantly visible in the school hallways and classrooms.

Related to the team approach are the constant efforts made by those at the schools to involve parents and the community in the schools. Mrs. Fredricks stressed the importance of parental involvement stating,

> We want their input into the situation also . . . . It's very important. . . the parents, they are important. It's a team effort. It takes all of us working together. . . and that's the important thing that we're all as much involved as we can.

She also indicated that she "is continuously calling" parents. Describing herself as "old fashioned, she " frequently conducts home visits to speak with parents in the home. Although this is not considered typical procedure, Mrs. Fredricks has found that it can be important in learning about a child's home life. Parental contact was also important in Woodland's program. Mr. Pryor indicated that he had made over 240 parental contacts by home visits, phone calls, and conferences since the beginning of the year.

Support from the community is essential. Mrs. Fredricks declared, "I will tell anybody that when you start an alternative school, make sure you have the collaboration with your community agencies. That's the only way you're going to be successful." She consistently praised her school's collaborative and the work of Mrs. Gray, the on site Cities and Schools coordinator, in bringing community services to the CrossRoads students. At Woodland, Mr. Pryor indicated that they also find it important to connect the school to the community. "What the whole staff at CrossRoads really likes to do is to bring a lot of outside people and their expertise [to the school]." He gave examples of a local minister discussing self-esteem, work and conflict resolution, and social skills. A nurse was scheduled to speak on a regular basis on summer safety, teen sex, and alcohol and drug prevention. In another instance, he was able to obtain much needed clothes for a student. Woodland

additionally was bringing their students to the community. A relationship was developed between the school and a local nursing home. Students visited the nursing home several times to interact with the residents, cook, and share in some activities.

A second crucial aspect that was regarded as related to the success of these programs has to do with the atmosphere or "feel" of the program. Those involved in both of the schools spoke of their dedication to the students and the satisfaction they received working at the schools. The administrators, faculty, and staff all indicated their desire to work at the school with chronically disruptive youth. As Mr. Pryor, the social worker at Woodland, told me, "I really like working with this particular population. . . . this has probably been the hardest one year . . . of working that I have ever had, but I think that it has been the best year in terms of personal growth [and] professionally for me."

Mrs. Smith originally did not wish to work at the CrossRoads school. Having worked with special education students, she did not feel prepared to work with "bad kids" or to teach with computers. Her views soon shifted. She confessed, "I was assigned here . . . . I was extremely upset about it. I did not want to come down here, but things have changed. . . . I can actually see a light at the tunnel for some of these kids." Mrs. Taylor told me, They [the students] know we care." She encourages them through praise, "reminding them [that] they are lazy, not stupid or dumb" and that they can succeed if they set their minds to it.

Mrs. Young described "the staff" as a key element in a successful program stating, "The teacher is so very important . . . . it is important to have somebody working with the students who is willing to go the whole nine yards for them." Unfortunately, she discovered this lesson the hard way. The original teacher at Woodland was "was one who should not have been in the program." He did not

work well with this student population. "They made the mistake of putting a teacher in the program who didn't fit anywhere else without realizing how detrimental it would be to the program." You need a teacher who is "instructional, compassionate, and forgiving," someone who "sees these students as having a future," and "who gives students a 'fresh start'" so that whatever you do today is erased tomorrow." When Mrs. Taylor arrived as the new teacher, things began to run more smoothly. Mrs. Young additionally discussed the importance of having a shared philosophy among staff members. To be successful the administration and staff must share "virtually the same philosophy in how they feel about kids and how they feel about being with kids."

The third characteristic of success is supervision and prevention. Both schools had highly structured programs. Teachers and staff were always aware of the atmosphere at the school. Mr. Cobb, a coach at Westview related, that they watch the students " to try to prevent things happening in the school." Mrs. Fredricks said that they read the undercurrents by "greeting students" as they arrive at school, "talking to them as they go from class to class," and reading their expressions so that they know what is going on with the students. Similarly, the staff at Woodland, were constantly in touch with their students moods and actions. At points during my site visits to both schools, I witnessed teachers or staff individually speaking with students about their concerns. In fact, it was not uncommon for students to report incidents about to occur so that the situations could be diffused before they happened.

How do program participants see their role in the Program?

The participants of the CrossRoads Programs saw themselves as having multiple roles reflecting their various responsibilities. For all involved, the goal was to do what was necessary to support the students and help them succeed. Mrs.

Fredricks spoke of herself and her staff as being "in the business of saving students, doing what we can to educate students." Mr. Cobb stressed that the school was not considered "punishment," but that they were there to "help them [students] with their problems" and give them "a second chance." Mrs. Young saw her mission as to providing an "opportunity for our students to understand that they can succeed and that they have to be responsible for that success, responsible for their actions and that there are consequences for those actions."

Administrators, teachers, and staff all served as role models for the students. They tried to model acceptable behavior, dress, and social interactions. This meant taking a personal approach, getting to know individual students, developing trusting relationships and showing them that "these people do care. They're concerned about me . . . as a person, as an individual." One student described the school as "the Westview family." She told me, "The teachers care about us. They get involved, know my background, know who I am. I'm not just a face and a name." Another student described Mrs. Fredricks as someone like "a big sister."

Mentoring opportunities were also solicited from outside of the schools. Bringing successful people from the community to the school, particularly those who come from backgrounds similar to the students, helps the students see that "there's hope. It lets the kids know there's hope." Both schools actively recruited speakers and presenters from professionals and other people from the community.

At Westview, professional clothing was the general mode of attire for administrators, teachers, and staff. Men wore ties and women wore suits or dresses. Woodland's staff also dressed professionally, but more casual. Dressing professionally was one way of modeling work behavior. Although it was not the role of the school to provide students with jobs, those at Westview needed to prepare students for the work world. Mrs. Fredricks stated, "It's our responsibility to

help them [the students] to be able to present themselves in a manner that they can get a job. That's pretty important . . . they don't have social skills." She added, it is "our responsibility to help them stay on the job and be successful."

As a counselor and social worker, Mr. Pryor described his role as "the advocate for the students" and a mediator. When conflicts arise, he tries to remain "impartial" and listen to students' concerns as well as the teachers. Additionally, he is responsible for getting the parents involved through "parental contact," "home visits, telephone calls, and conferences." He explained,

> Let's say a parent has a problem with something that has happened in school . . . I try to stay neutral. . . I do the work for the school system, but I want to take the parents' side too if I feel that the parent has a legitimate complaining against something. . . Then I will go to the teachers and try to mediate that way.

Similarly, he mediates between the school, the community and outside agencies.

Mrs. Sands role at Westview incorporated some of the responsibilities as Mr. Pryor's. Additionally, she saw herself in a support role, providing support to "the educators, the teachers, whatever they need for their classroom." She was involved in a program which found mentors from the community to serve as role models for students.

What factors do participants believe are related to Program effectiveness?

Several strategies were discussed as leading to the effectiveness of the two programs studied. As previously mentioned, a team approach to working with students was considered essential. All of the staff worked toward similar goals. They supported each other in every aspect of the program. Although students were treated fairly, they were not enabled to play staff members against each other.

Structure was a second strategy considered to be important. The school day was very structured leaving students little time to get into trouble or off task. For

example, only three minutes were allotted for class changes at Westview. If students stopped in the halls, they were told, "Keep moving." Students at Woodland followed a rigid schedule. They knew what was expected of them for each period of the day.

Students at both schools were aware of the school rules. They were also informed of the consequences of breaking the rules. In both schools, the rules were posted in most of the classrooms. Mr. Cobb told me, "We let them know where they stand. We don't . . . beat around the bush." When a student broke a rule, he/she was quickly reprimanded. Mrs. Young told me, "We tell kids that if you don't do it by the rules, then you are going to suffer the consequences, and the consequences are swift." The students constantly "test you" so the staff must be firm and consistent. Mr. Pryor concurred with this stating, "Students need clear and concise rules . . . . Ever since we've been able to establish what is acceptable ad what is not, the students, if they think that it is fair, they'll keep in line with this."

> A strong focus on prevention was a third strategy. Mr. Cobb explained,
>
> If we back them in a corner, we can get any kid in this school in trouble. But we don't. We want to prevent that. We prevent fights. We don't let then start fighting and then break them up . . . . so we are always monitoring. . . . our whole concept is prevention.

Monitoring, supervision and visibility of staff were utilized to support the prevention strategy. Teachers and administrators were always visible in the schools. Students were extensively supervised at all times. Woodland's students were escorted to the cafeteria and to outdoor activities. At Westview, hall monitors ensured that students did not roam the halls. Westview students were even escorted to the rest rooms. Although many students complained about this, the strategy prevented fights and cigarette smoking by unsupervised students.

Security strategies were discussed to some extent earlier in this report. Staff at Westview carried walkie talkie radios and "panic buttons" were installed in all classrooms. They also screened students as they got off the buses in the morning. If there was any suspicion that a student might have a weapon, he/she was asked to empty his/her pockets or purses. This could be done at any time. Teachers at Woodland would also have students empty pockets or purses if they were suspected of carrying weapons or drugs. Neither school allowed hats, beepers, weapons of any kind, or book bags. Students who brought hats and bookbags were required to place them either in an office or other specified area.

Incentives were used by both schools to motivate students to improve academically, behaviorally, and socially. At Woodland, students were rewarded with candy for successfully completing academic units on the computer with grades of ninety or above. The "star system" employed by Mr. Dunn gave students a visual incentive to complete academic work. Mr. Dunn related that the students often competed for the most stars. Because the there was no full time janitor at Woodland, cleaning the classrooms before leaving for the day was an incentive used by students to earn extra credit. At both schools, students were allowed to go on field trips if they did well at the school. A more formal incentive was the use of point systems. Students "earn their way back to the regular school" by earning a certain number of points. A certain number of points can be earned for each day that the student does not violate school rules.

Careful planning of the student transition process or return to home schools was thought to be effective in aiding their integration back into a regular school environment. Some strategies employed by the schools were transition teams, counseling, and placing students in one or two exploratory courses in their home schools before fully transitioning them. Both schools "followed up" on their

transitioning students. Woodland's social worker counseled transitioning students. At Westview, a transitional team of teachers "visit the high school and the middle school to see what the student needs." Mrs. Fredricks related that "the transitional team is important, because once he [a student] leaves us, he's not finished . . . We are here to help him change his behavior and he knows once he earns his way from here . . . we're going to track him for the remainder of the year." Successful tracking of returning students often produces suggestions for improvement. Mrs. Fredricks said that they are even taking ideas from the transitioning students regarding how to improve the CrossRoads Program to make the transition easier. For example, one student indicated that she wished she had been assigned more homework at Westview since homework is assigned at the regular school.

What outcomes can be identified?

Every staff member at both schools I visited provided examples of students who had made improvement in their academics, behaviors, and social skills. Depending on the individual student, the improvements varied greatly. Anecdotal evidence of these improvements included students getting in fewer fights and academic gains, attendance and social skills. Some students were able to increase their academic levels by one or two grade levels. Westview reported that 50% of their middle school students passed 5 out of 6 classes during the first semester and 55% of the high school students passed 6 out of 6 classes in the same time frame (Westview School, 1995). The Honor Roll included 11% of the total Westview student population (1995). Woodland's students also exhibited high levels of academic gains with most students at least doubling the number of classes they passed. Students reported making "better grades" and learning "to do my work." One student indicated that "all my grades have improved plus my overall average

has come up tremendously." Another student wrote, "I use (sic) to get all bad grades on my report card, but now I'm doing a lot better."

Team programs such as physical education and activities such as chess were viewed as improving relationships and social skills. Staff at both schools related stories of students initial inability to play team games or games such as chess without an escalation into a fight or argument. As time went by, the students worked as "teams." In many cases, this was manifested in their supporting each other and placing pressure upon each other to "straighten up." Students commented that the school, "has taught me how to control my temper," "my attitude has improved," and "I have learned to walk away from trouble."

At Woodland and Westview, student absences were reported to decrease immensely, in some instances by over 50%. Students at both schools reported increases in their attendance. Table 5 displays a comparison of attendance records of 11 students who were in the Woodland County School from its inception to the time present (Woodland County CrossRoads Program Proposal, 1995).

Table 5. Comparison of Attendance Records of 11 Students Who Were in CrossRoads from Beginning to Present.

Student	*1993-1994 Absences*	*1994-1995 Absences*
Student 1	46	15
Student 2	10	5
Student 3	52	26
Student 4	49	9
Student 5	6	5
Student 6	25	7
Student 7	25	3
Student 8	44	13

Student 9	55	2
Student 10	83	34
Student 11	32	30

Note: There have been 22 students in the program; however, the other 11 were not in this system last year or came into the program after the first semester. Therefore, we were not able to compare absences of all students.

Westview reported 64% of their high school students as having returned to their base school at the end of the first semester. Statistics indicating the success rate of the transition process at either school was unavailable at this time. This is largely due to the fact that the programs are too new to determine whether students are successful in transitioning. Of the few who have returned, some appear to be adapting to the regular school environment, while others have not been able to function successfully. Commenting on this issue, Mrs. Fredricks stated, "Well it's a little early to determine what is going to happen to the kids who have gone back. I guess that they are actually going to graduate."

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recommendation 1: A team approach to teaching and learning at CrossRoads schools appears to be linked to program success. For this reason, the careful selection of staff for the CrossRoads Programs is viewed as a crucial. Staff members should be selected because they wish to work with the chronically disruptive student population, not because they are being punished or do not fit elsewhere. The staff selected should share in the vision of the collective mission of the school and program.

Recommendation 2: Community involvement in the CrossRoads Programs is an essential component of a successful program. The two schools studied for this project both had strong collaboratives and community involvement. This may

reflect the fact that both schools had a full-time on-site social worker or counselor and access to community services. In the case of Westview, an on-site Georgia Cities and Schools coordinator and an on-site DFACS case worker built a relationship between the school, the community and other agencies.

Recommendation 3: As a rule, both of the schools operated from a prevention rather than punishment paradigm. Preventative measures and supervision in conjunction with personalization contributed to success. The school staffs became aquainted with their students on an individual basis, familiarizing themselves with student histories, problems and concerns. This knowledge aided them to get to the root of and prevent many potential behavior problems. Training for new CrossRoads staff which teaches these strategies would provide them with the necessary skills to work effectively within a "preventative" school environment.

Recommendation 4: Little is known about successful transitioning from the CrossRoads Programs back to the regular schools. Some students have been transitioned, however, it is still too early to determine their success. Extensive study into the transition process is needed to determine how to best smooth the transition process and aid students with a continuation of their successes.

Recommendation 5: The time allotted for the study of these two CrossRoads sites was extremely limited. An in-depth, long-term case study of one or more successful schools would provide additional information about the functioning, decision making processes, relationships and politics involved with the programs.

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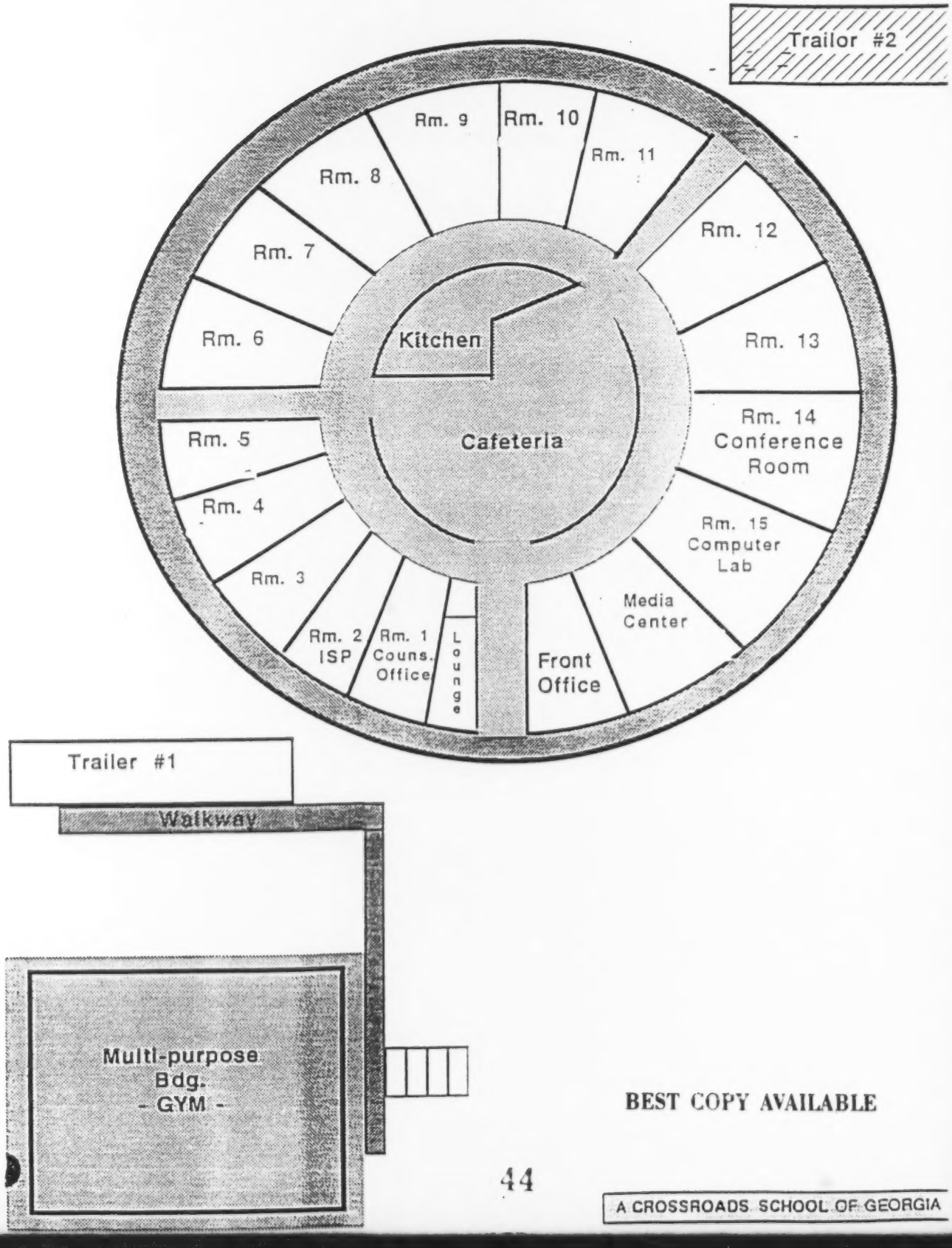
Appendix A: State CrossRoads Regions

State CrossRoads Regions

Appendix B: Westview School Floor Plan



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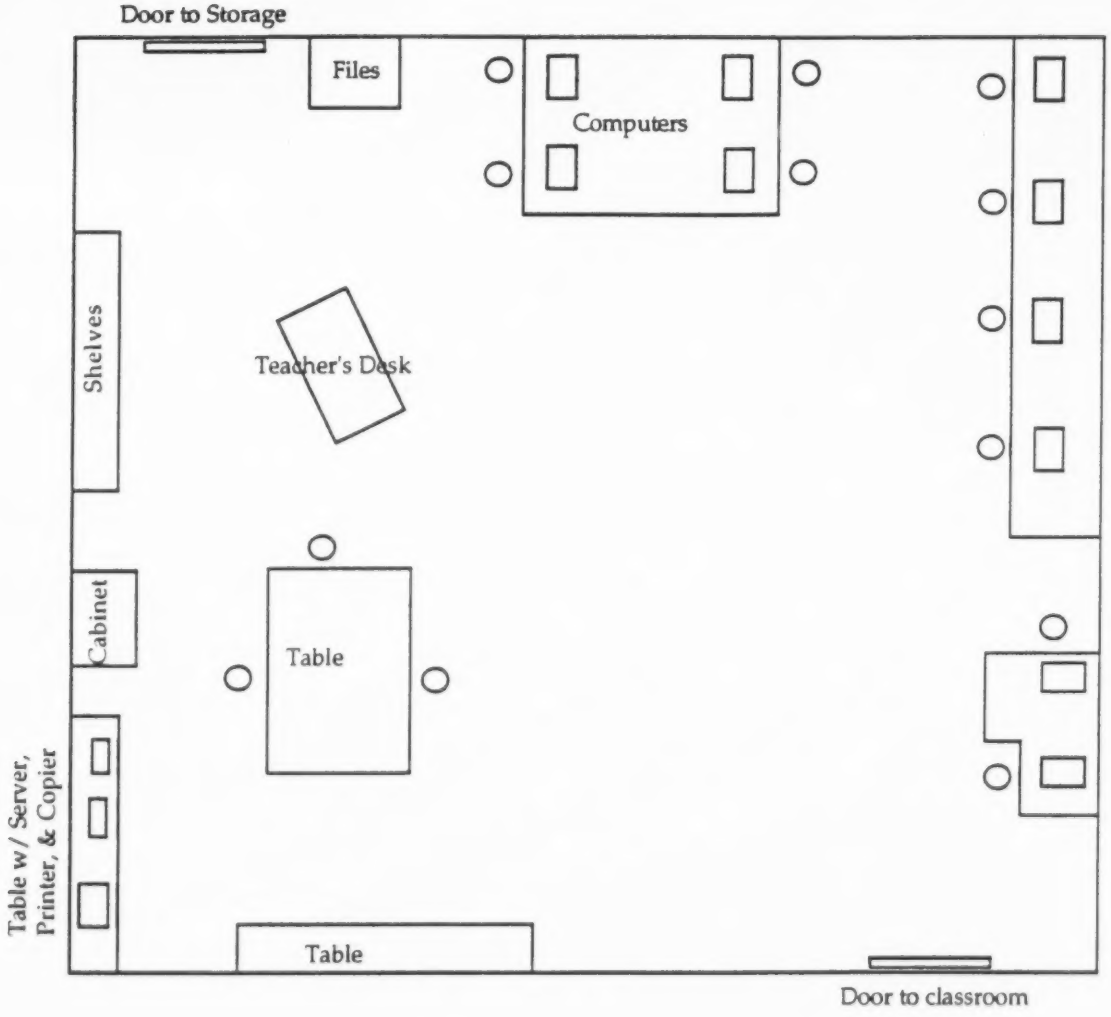
Appendix C: Woodland Computer Laboratory Floor Plan


Door to Storage
Files
Computers
Shelves
Teacher's Desk
Cabinet
Table
Table w/ Server,
Printer, & Copier
Table
Door to classroom